

Shatter [part three]

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"You're staring at her like she's dinner," Xander commented, glaring at the vampire as Angel watched Willow and Giles do weapons inventory. "Which she better not be," he warned, his voice low and even.

"She's not," Angel replied, glancing over at the boy. "I'm just amazed--"

"That we haven't staked you yet?" Xander finished.

"No," Angel responded evenly. "That you three have managed to survive without help for so long." Xander shrugged.

"G-man tried to call the Slayer here like she was supposed to be, but things fell through. Apparently there's a lot of demonic activity in Cleveland," Xander commented. "So we dealt and improvised."

"What happened?" Angel asked. "The Master, I mean. How did he rise?"

"Oh, the Harvest," the boy stated as if the event in and of itself meant nothing. "The Vessel fed, the Master rose, people died." There was a hardness in his voice that hadn't been there before.

"You lost friends." Angel didn't bother to phrase it as a question, already knowing the answer. Xander didn't reply verbally, only nodding his head slightly. "Her story?" Angel asked, indicating

Willow with a tilt of his chin.

"You got a stiff one for Will?" Xander asked, not bothering to hide his grin. Angel narrowed his eyes but didn't comment. "You want her story, ask her yourself," he replied, leaning back in the chair as Giles and Willow walked over and joined the pair at the table.

"Are you two patrolling again?" Giles asked, gathering the books off the table and heading for the stacks.

"Oh, I don't know," Xander replied, smirking at Angel. "Maybe Will and the new guy can have a go." He wiggled his eyebrows at the vampire. Willow smacked him in the back of the head.

"Mind out of the gutter, Xand," she ordered with a smile.

"But the gutter's comfie," he pouted. Giles sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose slightly.

"Children," he muttered, carrying the books up the stacks.

"C'mon, Deadboy," Xander ordered, standing up and pulling his leather jacket off the back of the chair. "Let's go show you the night-life." The three of them left the library with a wave to Giles as he exited the stacks.

"Be careful," the librarian called after the trio.

Xander walked in front of Willow and Angel, scanning the road in front of them for vampires while Willow and Angel scanned the sides of the road.

"So, Will," Angel began, but Willow cut him off with a wave of her hand.

"Only Xander calls me Will," she stated, eyes never leaving her side of the road.

"Okay, Willow--"

"Only Giles calls me Willow," she replied, casting a quick grin in his direction.

"Fine, _Red_," he growled.

"'Red?' I like it," she smirked. "Sounds dangerous." Angel laughed suddenly, causing Willow to turn and stare at him with eyebrows raised.

"I can't figure you out," he stated once he quieted. "One second you're ready to kill me, and the next, you're my best friend." She shrugged.

"I figure, you've been neutered so no danger," she smirked, turning and hurrying to catch up with Xander.

"Oh, Red, I'm far from neutered," he grinned, watching the way her muscles moved as she walked away from him. Angel shook himself, trying to get those thoughts out of his head, and followed the other two. He was within a yard of them when a vamp jumped out of a small

thicket of trees. It grabbed for Willow, but the redhead moved deftly out of its way. She spun around pulling two things out of her pocket, a bottle of holy water and a stake. She threw the bottle at the vampire's face as it turned to grab her again; with it blinded, she rammed the stake into its heart. She grinned at Angel and Xander as the vampire disappeared.

"Good job, Will," Xander praised just as the trees rustled again and another vampire leapt out at the pair. Angel moved into action, pulling a stake Willow had stuffed into his jacket pocket out. He moved between Willow and the attacking vampire and managed to stake it, just as a blinding pain hit the small of his back. Angel glanced over his shoulder and managed to catch sight of a crossbow bolt sticking out his back. He glared up at the two teens. Xander grinned sheepishly and waved his crossbow at the vampire.

"You okay, Angel?" Willow asked, moving up beside the vampire.

"I will be as soon as someone gets this thing out of me," he stated, still glaring at the teenage boy.

"Hey, if you hadn't got in my way," Xander shrugged. Willow rolled her eyes, placing one of her hands on the shaft of the bolt and the other flat on Angel's back around the entry wound.

"Count of three," she stated calmly. She glanced up at the back of Angel's head and yanked the bolt out without warning. Angel sucked in an unneeded breath.

"You lied," he hissed. Willow shrugged.

"Details," she stated, turning to face Xander. "You want to call it a night?"

"Sure, since Deadboy's pretty much out of commission," Xander answered.

"So that was just an elaborate plot to get to go home early?" Angel asked, straightening up, his wound already healing.

"Yep," Xander replied happily as the trio headed towards the library.

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